Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Foot Ulcers

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Patient and Carer Information

Podiatry Service

The Patient Information Leaflets page on the Trust website is available on the link: https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets or scan the QR code.

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What is a foot ulcer?

A foot ulcer is a medical term for an open sore. Foot ulcers can take weeks or months to heal. Occasionally they can deteriorate and lead to severe infection, gangrene or amputation.

Common causes of foot ulcers:

- Ill-fitting footwear
- Injury
- Walking barefoot
- Poor foot hygiene
- Dry skin.

Diabetes, foot deformity, poor blood supply or nerve damage to the feet can increase the risk of foot ulcers.

How are foot ulcers treated?

A treatment plan will be agreed between you and your podiatrist following an assessment. This plan will include regular dressings, debridement and pressure relief, as explained below:

Regular dressing of your ulcer

There are many different kinds of dressings; your podiatrist will suggest the best one for you.

Debridement when appropriate

Debridement is a term used to describe the removal of hard skin, dead or infected tissue. Debridement is not usually painful.

Studies have shown that appropriate debridement of foot ulcers helps them to heal faster.

Debridement reveals the full size of the ulcer:

- It reduces the pressure on the edge of the ulcer
- It reduces the risk of trapped infection.

Following debridement, the ulcer may appear bigger or may bleed, but it will be a cleaner ulcer. The quickest way to debride an ulcer is using a scalpel blade. If this is not appropriate, a suitable dressing may be applied to encourage the ulcer to debride itself.

Pressure relief is an important part of your treatment plan. Any pressure exerted on your ulcer, either from footwear or walking, will slow down the healing process.

There are many different ways of taking pressure off your ulcer. You and your podiatrist can decide together which would be best for you. Resting your foot as much as possible provides the best form of pressure relief.

Do I need to take antibiotics?

You will only need antibiotics if your ulcer is infected. You will receive individual advice if you develop infection.

Remember - you should contact your Podiatrist or GP immediately if you:

- Develop hot or cold sweats or flu-like symptoms
- Notice any change to your affected foot, such as an increase in swelling, redness, pain, or the amount of fluid coming from the ulcer.

Will I need special tests?

Sometimes tests may be necessary. These will include:

- A swab from the ulcer to help identify bacteria (germs) which may be causing infection
- Circulation tests on your legs and feet – sensation tests to determine the feeling in your feet (neuropathy is the term used to describe a loss of feeling).
- Blood tests
- X-ray or scan to help determine if infection is in the bone.

Useful information

Do:

- Try to keep your legs elevated
- Try to keep your blood sugars under control if you have Diabetes. This is important to help promote healing
- Stop smoking. Smoking can damage your circulation and delay the healing process
- Keep your dressing in place and keep it dry
- Use any special footwear or insoles with which you have been provided
- Wear appropriate footwear at all times – even at home. Your podiatrist will be happy to advise you about footwear.

Do not:

- Sit or stand in one position for a long time
- Sit too close to the fire or heater
- Use hot water bottles, electric blankets or any other kind of heated pad
- Step straight into a hot bath – always check the temperature first using a bath thermometer, not your hands.

Should you have any cause for concern or any other queries please telephone:

0300 707 7700

You can get further advice and information from the following website: https://cop.org.uk



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